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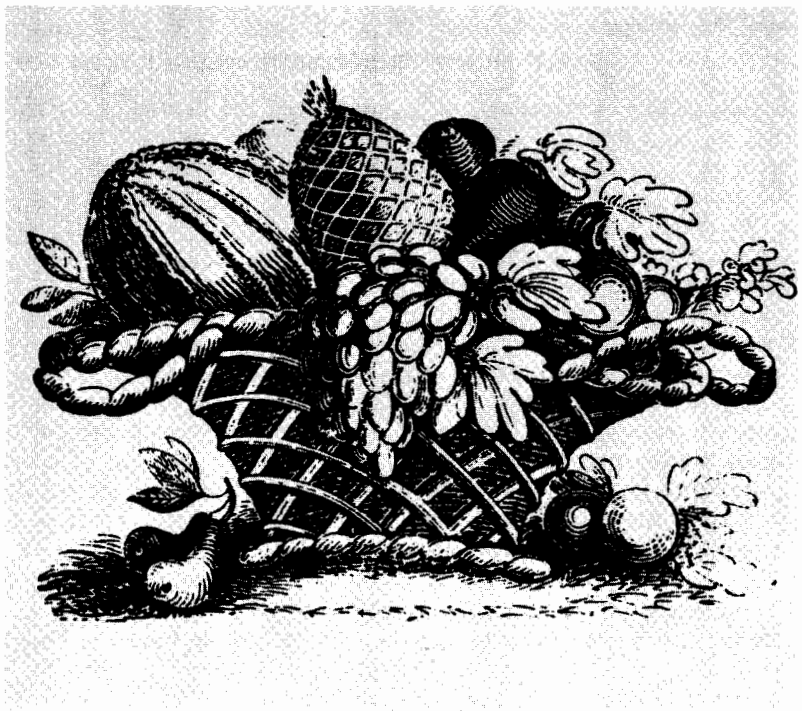

THE GIFTS OF GOD

As the Thanksgiving Season approaches and another year draws toward an end let us be mindful of the mercies of the Lord. His gifts to us are many, and no gift so precious as the revelation of the Christ and the grace bestowed through Him.

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever. (Psa. 118:11)

"I will not nullify the grace of God; if righteousness comes by law, then Christ died for nothing." (Gal. 2:21)

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Volume 8, No. 8 **October, 1966**

Editorial...

LEROY GARRETT, Editor

Personal Reminiscence . . .

EARLY MORNING RECOLLECTIONS

My daily routine includes rising early enough in the morning to have time for an hour of reading before the rest of the family gets up. I reserve this time for Bible reading, despite the temptation to use it for grading papers or preparing a class lecture. I would encourage others to do this. Even if it is but for 15 minutes each morning, a consistent investment of such time to reading and prayer can make an important difference in one's life. Every Christian should have a few minutes each day when he can read and pray *alone*. Early morning is preferable, for the mind is quick and the heart receptive.

The quietness of the morning is like balm to one who must be subjected to a day filled with the noises of our hectic world. To witness the break of day is to hear Nature whisper a lovely poem into your ear. To step out-of-doors, if but for a moment, while a new day is being born, is to sense a freshness that seems to restore the hopes and dreams of a childhood faith. Quietness is surely hard to come by in our clanging world, and it is tragic that our regimented lives allow Nature to perform its daily program of miracles without our notice. No wonder we have a shortage of poets.

When reading the Bible in early morning, more than at other times, I am reminded of some of the less momentous incidents in my life that might have been forgotten if they were not associated with passages of scripture. Perhaps you too have the experience of reminiscing when you recall particular scriptures, and it may be that some of your memories date back many years.

Hardly ever do I think of Phil. 4:13 but what it brings to mind the time that my mother was to undergo serious surgery and needed encouragement. I suggested that she say to herself over and over again "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I recall seeing her later as they

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wheeled her into surgery, already under sedation, and her lips were moving to the cadence of Paul's inspiring words: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

One of our eminent evangelists of the past generation was G. A. Dunn, who still lives at the ripe age of 91. He and I were very close. He was my Paul and I was his Timothy. Now that I have grown older I love him all the more, and our past together has many cherished memories. To be sure I often think of brother Dunn when I read the Bible, recalling some emphasis that he placed upon a particular scripture. Though he could never write like he could speak, his many letters to me are among my prized possessions. There were times in my youth when I thought I had good reasons to be discouraged. Brother Dunn would write to me, urging that I "Suffer hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." He would tell me that modern preachers do not know what it is to suffer for the sake of the gospel. I did not doubt his words then and I doubt them less now. I think of brother Dunn and those days when I read 2 Tim. 2:3, as well as a hundred other scriptures.

And there are times when I could be caught blushing, even at 6 a.m., when I read some passages that remind me how badly I once intrepreted them. Sometimes I have the urge to turn time back and preach all those sermons of yesteryear over again. But this is normal. What bridge builder does not in afteryears wonder how his first efforts ever held up? What artist does not reflect a tinge of embarrassment when again exposed to his first experiences with the canvas? And besides *all* those sermons of my youth were not bad, or the sermons were not all bad. Either way.

But the recollection that called forth this personal account came to me a few mornings ago while I was reading in 1 Corinthians. It goes back a full 28 years, a fact I find hard to accept. That many years takes me back to my teens and to the depression, and to many sad and hurtful experiences that are painful to recall. Besides poverty in the family, it seems that my boyhood sweethearts were always getting married on me, though I'm not old enough yet to write about that chapter of my life. But I'll assure you that it would be worth waiting for! Through the years I have tried to turn pathos into mirth by telling my students about my experiences with my old girl friends. I always get a roar of laughter out of them when I say, "I show them, I do. Whenever they get married on me I quit going with them." And some of the girls at T.W.U. act as if they want to cry when I add: "But there is *one* who didn't get married on me, and I'm still going with her, and she is the joy of my life—a T.W.U. girl, of course!"

The girls move to the edge of their seats when I tell them about finding my wife on their campus, and how one night I returned her to her dorm at the ghastly hour of 11:01, only to find ourselves locked out, being one minute late as we were. Room check was in progress. Ouida was the girl dating "that nice young minister" and it just wouldn't do for her to go before the discipline committee. I noticed that the old Smith-Carroll dorm (a new one stands there now) was having its windows painted and that the screens were removed. The ladder used by the paint-

ers was lying on the ground just below Ouida's second floor room.

At this point in the story I can always feel the tenseness of the girls who still cope with the same old rules, as if they are trying to say: "You didn't! You didn't! At last I tell them what happened if they promise not to tell the dean on me. They sigh with relief when I assure them that Ouida scooted up the ladder like a monkey going after a coconut, and no more than got her two feet on the floor of her room when the dorm mother opened the door and checked off two more girls as safely ensconced. The roommate could hardly believe her eyes when sweet, mild-mannered Ouida came tumbling through the window. Ouida still recounts how her face must have mirrored her wicked deed, and she is still sure that if she had not turned her back on the house mother the world would have come to an end then and there. Her record remained immaculate.

Ouida gets real uneasy about my telling that episode on the T.W.U. campus, even if my students do love me for it. Her sins are so few that she is sure that even after all these years they might get us for it! I can just see the writeup in a Dallas newspaper: "TWU Prof Fired For Slipping Wife Into Dorm." That would give us more publicity than we got when we gave Ladybird an honorary degree. That is what I should have—an honorary degree—for I am surely the only fellow in the history of Texas Woman's University with the magic to place his date in her second floor room after zero hour and with the doors all bolted. And here we are back at the same university. We bear watching, you can tell 'em.

But I just must stop this foolishness. Since Ouida proofreads all this stuff you'll probably never read it anyhow. It was years before Ouida and T.W.U. that I left Dallas, barely 19, lonely and insecure, and without so much as a high school diploma, for Freed-Hardeman College. It was a new world to me. I had never before been out of Texas, and I'd have sworn the Mississippi River was the Atlantic Ocean.

I was soon deeply devoted to Freed-Hardeman. I learned my lessons well enough and my zeal was marked enough that I was soon preaching on weekends around the country more than most of the preacher boys, and I was sure that I had it made when brother N. B. Hardeman, the president (whom I always loved so very much), called on me to preach in his place at the college church. I began to feel more secure in the presence of such teachers as brother Hardeman, C. P. Roland, W. C. Hall, and L. L. Brigance. It was a wonderful experience. Nothing bad ever happened. It would have been impossible for me then to have imagined any set of circumstances that would cause some of those same men to have me locked up in jail at some future visit to Freed-Hardeman College. I still can't believe it! It remains by far the most incredible of all my life's experiences.

Some of the tenderest memories of Freed-Hardeman are of L. L. Brigance, who has long since passed from this earth, and it was he that I recalled to mind the other morning while reading 1 Cor. 4:8-13. It was brother Hardeman that had the class, the color, and the flair; and it was he that held the

big tabernacle meetings and who was known far and wide. He was the big preacher, and it was he that attracted us to the college, all quite justly perhaps. But no one was more deeply respected and loved than brother Brigance. He was the kind of person who never seemed to sell for what he was worth. Years later when I was visiting with brother Hardeman in his home he made that very statement about L. L. Brigance, an evaluation that has impressed me through the years as being true of so many good men, who never seem to sell for what they are worth.

But it is easy for us to have false notions about success and acceptance. The kings among us may well be those who humble themselves as servants. "For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends." (2 Cor. 10:18) In his pride man seeks the applause of the crowd or the party. Too few are truly concerned for the commendation of the Lord. It might be a sobering experience as well as surprising if we could compare our list of the great and the mighty of our various parties with the Lord's list. The Lord's roster of "successful men" might be the unknowns, or even those we reject by applying this or that label.

Brother Brigance was as unassuming as any man I've ever known. He made no pretension of knowing very much. His dependence on *Johnson's Notes* in his New Testament classes disturbed some of us, but his humble approach to the Bible made up for other kinds of depth. He was a kind, gentle man who was never erratic or ill-tempered. During one term of school he had the problem of his students cheating in his classes. So one day he let us have it right between the eyes, however gentle it was. "I am shocked that young people would cheat in the study of the very Book that condemns such things," he would say to us. The rebuke was most effective coming from a man like brother Brigance, for we figured it was most likely that he had never cheated on anything all his life.

It was brother Brigance who sent me far across Tennessee to a town named Smithville on one of my first preaching assignments. They wanted a boy preacher from FHC to fill in for the summer. I spoke on "The Doctrine of Balaam" which I had borrowed from F. G. Allen's book of sermons at the morning service, and on "Prayer" which I had taken from McGarvey's book of sermons that evening. It was neither Allen's nor McGarvey's fault that I did not get the job, but I did make $15.00, which was an unbelievable amount of money to me, and by hitchhiking I got back to school with nearly all of it. Brother Brigance was sorry I did not get the summer job, and kindly explained: "They probably figured that you don't yet have quite enough experience."

Well, with help from him and some of the girls in school (I'd get them to ask their fathers who were elders in churches back home if I could come and preach) I preached my way through college. One time I was selected to take a *big* preacher's place in Arkansas during his absence for two weeks and preach every day on the radio, as well as in his pulpit on Sundays. I also got in my first funeral during this appointment. I was on my way to being a *bona fide* Church of Christ preacher, and there was nothing

I desired more. I hitchhiked everywhere. And when it came time for me to give my sermon in brother Hardeman's class on sermon outlines I made the fatal mistake of giving one that I called "Gospel Hitchhikers," which I very properly applied to irresponsible church members. But I never heard the last of that. "Hitchhike all over the country and then get up and preach about gospel hitchhikers," they would rib me.

It was during these days that I began to harbor serious doubts about "the minister" system, and it was brother Brigance's influence that played a part in this. When I began to express my doubts and to ask questions, I found it to be a very unpopular point of view. But I have always been something of a fighter, however ineffective, and I was not satisfied with anything less than a declaration of war. So while still at FHC I spoke to the Preacher's Club on the modern pastor system. That would have been a more logical time to have locked me up! Brother Claude Hall, the faculty sponsor of the club, got up after I spoke and told the fellows: "Leroy is wrong. Never mind *why* he is wrong, but he is wrong." That didn't satisfy me. If I were wrong, I wanted to know why. When brother C. L. Wilkerson came to the college for a gospel meeting, I talked to him about it. He told me something like this: "You are right in your understanding of the work of elders and evangelists in the New Testament, but that is not the way our preachers do it."

While I was resolved to oppose the preacher system, I soon saw the handwriting on the wall, figuring that if I were not to follow the popular route and hire out to a church as the minister and do what I was convinced was the work of elders, I had better prepare myself to make a living. So when I graduated from FHC and went to Abilene Christian College I changed my major to education, casting my lot with the future teachers instead of the future clergymen. I continued to preach, of course, but I was never again quite orthodox, and my adamant opposition to *the system* destined me to be a controversial figure, and the bitterness and rejection that followed was more than I was prepared for, despite the forewarnings of men like G. A. Dunn and L. L. Brigance. At this moment I am more convinced than ever that the sources of weakness of modern Christianity lie in its professional clergy system, which is wholly foreign to the New Testament scriptures, and that the Churches of Christ are just as guilty as any other denomination.

I got to thinking about these things the other morning. In my mind's eye sat old brother Brigance before his New Testament class, several of whom are now prominent Church of Christ educators and ministers, one being a college president. The old brother read with a wheeze, suffering with hay fever or something, but his words were clear: "I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place . . . "

At this point the dear brother paused to clear his throat, but it was not his hay fever as usual, for he was weeping. He removed his glasses and wiped his eyes and continued: "We labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."

I hadn't seen a preacher weep before, and even after all these years it remains a rare experience to see a man touched by the reading of the Bible. Brother Brigance did not apologize, but went on to talk about how the early preachers had to suffer for preaching Christ. I cannot now recall his exact words, but he drew a contrast between the privations endured by the apostles and the soft life of the modern minister who claims to be a New Testament evangelist. He thought it pathetic. He was tearful.

I think of our professional ministers here in the Dallas area, some of whom have salaries of around $1,000 monthly, plus various fees and handouts, and rather liberal tax benefits. With only a college degree, if even that, a young man just a few years out of Abilene can make upward of *twice* what the schoolteachers in his congregation make. Here in Denton the salaries of the Church of Christ ministers are comparable to or exceeds the income of experienced Ph.D.'s teaching in the universities. And they are paid such salaries, not for carrying the gospel to virgin fields, but for preaching again and again to church folk who have long since grown weary of listening, and for directing the affairs of the church. For a man who enjoys delivering speeches on spiritual topics and exercising other pastoral functions, it is a nice job with unusually good pay, especially in view of the qualifications required.

But it is understandable that the salaried minister, who is nearly always doing the work of the elders instead of that of an evangelist, would have little heart for brother Brigance's tract on the modern pastor system. None of us can begrudge a man earning a good income, but it is incongruous for a man to make $900 or $1,000 a month for talking about Jesus of Nazareth. I can take it a little better when a clergyman makes no bones about his professional interests, but when my own brethren practice the same thing, and then tell us this is *evangelistic* work, such as we read about in the New Testament, I am less sympathetic.

It has now been 25 years since brother Brigance wrote in the *Gospel Advocate* of his fears as to what would happen to the Church of Christ in the next quarter of a century if the pastor system continued to grow.

> There is no denying the fact that the "pastor system" exists among the churches of Christ today. It is a growing evil. It constitutes a major menace to the cause of Christ. If it continues to develop as rapidly during the next quarter of a century as it has during the last one, the greater part of the church is going to be corrupted by it. "Brethren, we are drifting." (*Gospel Advocate*, July 24, 1941)

Time has proved brother Brigance right. The Church of Christ of today is corrupted by a woeful ignorance of spirituality, a multiplicity of factions, an isolationism that separates us from the Christian world, a leadership that can operate only through

hired functionaries, an institutionalism that is more concerned for its own unique system than for social problems, and a traditionalism that stifles free thought. It is my conviction that the clerical system, with all that it entails, is at the root of this decadence.

But what touched me about brother Brigance was his reverence, a virtue far too rare in all walks of life. Ours is an irreverent culture, and even the churches are not known for their piety. An economist writing in a news magazine recently was complaining that the large sums of money left to churches are not spent to ease the misery of the world, but to maintain ecclesiastical institutions. We not only show irreverence in our attitude toward God's word, but especially in our lack of concern for the misfortune of others.

Whether we be physicians, business men, teachers, or housewives, we must view our tasks with a sense of awe and reverence. The mysteries of life should find us with hat in hand. The man who honors God will not only honor His word, but he will honor manhood and womanhood and an honest day's work. And he will reverence truth and those who honestly seek truth.

There is something deeply tender about an old man weeping before an open Bible, and it symbolizes a virtue so badly needed by our jet age. But there is something deeply horrifying about the story of the elder who was agitated over some of his people's concern for the Holy Spirit. "We are not going to have any of that Holy Spirit business around here!," he assured them.

There is a big difference here, isn't there? And it is in that difference that lies our hope for a more spiritual church.—*the Editor*

"How Vast the Resources of His Power . . . " No. 8

SAVED BY GRACE - - AND ONLY BY GRACE

Jude, the author of a very short book in the New Testament scriptures, speaks of Christians as *called, beloved in God,* and *kept for Jesus Christ.* Do not most of us think in terms of *keeping ourselves* in the faith rather than of *being kept* by the grace of God? Jude must have had strong convictions about the grace of God. Not only does he honor God by writing, "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling", but he also speaks of those who pervert the grace of God.

We speak often of people perverting the gospel and preverting the truth, in reference to such passages as Gal. 1:7, but we seem less conscious of the tragedy of perverting the grace of God. Jude is referring to the Gnostics who believed that the body is by nature evil, that only spirit is good, and that therefore the lusts of the flesh may be freely expressed, since the body is of no significance anyhow. Too, the grace of God covers all sins, so why not sin all one pleases, they reasoned. And thus they twisted the grace of God into a justification of blatant immorality, the term used here by Jude suggesting that they performed their impious acts publicly, not so much as caring if they were seen by others.

While this kind of behavior may be more prevalent than we realize, most of us are not so void of conscience as to pervert God's grace in this manner. But there is another way to pervert grace, and that is to assume that grace is dependent upon our work, or that it is only through our cooperation that the grace of God is effectual. Since Adam man's besetting sin has been the pride that presumes his own righteousness will save him. In his arrogance man assumes that he becomes worthy of salvation by some acts that he performs or commandments that he obeys. In this essay we are stating our conviction that deliverance from sin is solely by grace, and that any *cooperative* view of salvation is a rejection of grace. Any doctrine of justification with such arithmetic as "God's Part + Man's Part = Salvation" perverts the grace of God. Our thesis is that we are saved by grace—and *only* by grace! In the entire history of redemption no man ever did anything to save himself. We affirm further that the purpose of God in history is to reveal His grace through Christ with such splendor that man, smitten by his sinfulness, will yield himself to God, fully aware of his inability to save himself and fully conscious that there is nothing he can do to gain God's favor, and by such defeat of human pride man becomes a new creation in Christ, thus conformed to the image of God.

Any idea of "the plan of salvation" that suggests that man's own initiative figures into his justification is therefore wrong. The only "plan" involved in man's salvation is the grace of God. This is to say that we are not saved by being baptized, or by taking of the Lord's Supper, or by going to church each Wednesday night, or by almsgiving. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8).

Notice that provocative phrase *lest any man should boast.* Blessed is the man who is sufficiently aware of his unworthiness before God that he dare not boast in His presence. There is no greater resource of power than for one to realize that he has no power of his own, but that he must rely wholly upon God's strength. When we can say with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am," and to understand that *without* that grace we are nothing, we will then have the strength to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

One *is* boasting before God when he says, "I am saved because I have met all the requirements laid down for salvation," or "My sins are forgiven because I've been baptized." He is also boasting when he speaks of finally going to heaven by virtue of fulfilling the requirements of Christian service, whether it be performing faithfully "the five acts of worship" or reading the Bible every day. If one goes to heaven, it will be fully and completely because of God's grace, and not because of any deed he has done. We can approach God with neither gun nor purse, for we can neither wrest it from him by our insistence nor buy it from him by our deeds.

This was the point of Paul writing *Romans,* that the saint's relationship to God is solely by grace. He is emphatic in writing, "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (3:24) And in verse 28 he adds: "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law." In 4:16 he points out that righteousness must "rest on grace", lest it be reckoned as one's due instead of God's gift.

Emphasis upon the grace of God in our lives must not overlook what the Bible says about our being justified by works. It states plainly, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas. 2:24), and the same passage speaks of Abraham's faith as being "completed by works." Verse 26 insists that "As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

Paul urged the Philippians to "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," (2:12) and he assured the Corinthians that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10). And the judgment scene in Rev. 20 speaks of the dead being judged "by what they had done."

Along with these passages that reveal that we are to be judged by our works, there are numerous others that stress obedience. We are assured in 2 Thess. 1:8 that the Christ will "inflict vengeance upon those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." Even in *Romans,* where Paul lays such stress upon salvation by grace, reference is made to those who were "obedient from the heart to that standard of teaching to which you were committed" (6:17). In Rom. 16.7 Paul speaks of the necessity of "obedience to the faith." And so our Lord commands: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). Beginning with John the Baptist it was declared that men should prove the reality of their repentance by the excellence of their deeds.

There appears to be here a very damaging contradiction. One set of passages affirms that salvation is by grace, apart from the works of law; another set of passages places great stress upon works, insisting that salvation comes by deeds as well as by faith. It does not resolve the problem to say that salvation is by *both* grace and deeds, for this is the very thing that Paul disavows in his teaching that we are saved by grace through faith, apart from any human works. If it is by grace, then it is not of works; if it is by works, then it is not of grace. This is the way Paul talks in Rom. 4. But James talks quite differently, avowing that faith apart from works is dead.

Any solution of this problem is fatal that concludes that man even in the least gains salvation by what he does, for in such a conclusion there is the implication that in some sense he *deserves* to be saved. We must insist, in view of Paul's thesis in *Romans,* that the most loyal and obedient Christian no more *deserves* to be saved than the wildest Hottentot of the jungles of Africa. There is that passage that so few of us believe: "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty' " (Lk. 17:10).

We often hear it said of some dear saint who has passed on: "If he doesn't go to heaven, then no one will." But the truth is that such a one, however dedicated his life, no more deserves to go to heaven than the world's most h a r d e n e d criminal. Though we are reluctant to admit it, we really believe that if one has been baptized and gives himself diligently to the affairs of the church that he has more right to go to heaven than has his disobedient neighbor. Surely if the teaching on grace means anything at all it means that a lifetime of good works will not bring us any nearer heaven. The blessings of heaven are bestowed upon the saints only by God's grace. The man never lived, except the Christ himself, who deserved to go to heaven. All the good works the world over, and throughout all ages, could not make one worthy of one moment of heavenly glory.

Most of you who read these words have a "works" background, which means that you have been conditioned to associate good works with being saved. We believe that if we are regular at such things as breaking bread on Lord's day, giving of our means, observing holy Wednesday, and fulfilling a number of other points that make us *loyal,* we will be saved. It is the same old story of being justified by a punctilious observance of laws and commandments. One simply cannot believe this and believe what the Bible teaches about grace.

It is true that others may have a "cheap grace" background, which perverts grace into a means of saving man apart from any discipline in his life at all. We must avoid both of these fallacies, each of which is rooted in pride. We avoid the first by the humble realization that all man's works are as filthy rags and wholly inadequate to merit salvation. He deserves hell and not heaven, in spite of all his good deeds; and if God gives him heaven, it is wholly by grace. We avoids the second fallacy by realizing that we are saved by grace *through faith,* and that it is a live, vital, and responsive faith that gives grace meaning.

Herein lies the harmony, we believe, between Paul and James and between salvation by grace and good deeds. Paul and James are starting at different points as they speak of works. Paul speaks of the alien sinner, while James is talking about those who are already saved. No man can win or earn forgiveness, however long he may repent or how many times he may be baptized. It is by God's grace only, apart from anything man can do. James starts with the man who claims to be a Christian, and tells that he must show his faith by his works. He is saying that faith is dead if it is not perfected in works, or that profession without practice is meaningless. He is showing that there is much more to Christianity than an intellectual acceptance, that being a Christian is a response of the whole self to the Lord.

We are saved *for* deeds, James is saying. We are not saved *by* deeds, Paul is saying. As saints of God we work because we are saved, not in order to be saved. This means that it is a certain kind of faith that saves. It is a *qualitative* faith, or a *responsive* faith. Surely when Paul speaks of our

being justified by faith, he has in mind a responsive, obedient faith. We have mentioned passages where he stresses obedience, which indicate that he realized that the free gift of grace must be responded to by the sinner. He must accept the grace through obedience.

Is this not true of all the expressions of *common* grace (as distinguished from the *special* grace we've been discussing) that are so evident in nature. Water is a free gift of God, bestowed upon us only by His grace, but still we must dig a well or build a cistern. Is it not true that a man could die of thirst with water even at his lips? All God's gifts, whether electricity or atomic energy, must be appropriated. But they are none the less *gifts.*

A friend may express his love to me by presenting me with a set of very precious books. He instructs me to write the publisher of the books and present proper identification so that the set will be forwarded to me immediately. If I never wrote the publisher, I would never receive the books. I must show a faithful response to my friend's love by following his instructions, and then the gift will be mine. Once I do this and receive the prized set, would it not be foolish for me to speak of receiving the books by means of my own works? Would it not also be a mistake to think that I had *cooperated* with my friend in getting the books? Is it not solely by the grace of my friend that the books are mine? May I dare say that in some way I deserve the books because I wrote to the publisher and identified myself?

This illustrates the place of obedience in Paul's thinking—"the obedience of faith" as he speaks of it. Baptism is therefore no work that we perform in order to gain salvation. It is an act chosen of God whereby we can make a faithful response to his free gift of grace. Once we are baptized we no more deserve to be saved than before, and it is certainly not baptism that saves us. It is like the thirsty man who puts the cup of water to his lips, or like my writing to the publisher for the books. I deserve nothing. I am not worthy of anything. Being baptized does not change that. I am saved by grace—and *only* by grace. We are to thank God that He selected an act, one that is richly symbolic and meaningful, whereby we can respond to His great and wonderful grace. I am delighted to follow my Lord's instructions in being immersed, and if it pleased Him, I would gladly be immersed every day of my life. But no *act* performed by man, however submissive it may be or however often it may be done, can save.

All the blessings associated with baptism, whether the remission of sins or being "in Christ", are the result of God's work, not ours. It is when speaking of our being buried with Christ in baptism that Paul uses the term "the working of God" (Col. 2:12), and in John 6:29 our Lord identifies faith itself as the work of God. Baptism should be viewed as "the cultivation of grace", to use Alexander Campbell's description, which makes it God's work rather than our own. It is like a beautiful garden, made possible only by the gifts of nature, but appropriated by a faithful gardener.

Does this mean that baptism (and other responses of faith) is necessary? It all depends on what we make *necessary* mean. Necessary to eternal salvation in heaven with God? We cannot say this, for God is God, and He is not subject to any limitation (1 Cor. 15:27), and it may be His will to extend His saving grace to a Hitler or an Eichmann. We cannot make even faith itself a condition for going to heaven, for God in His great mercy, because of circumstances that we know not of, may save an infidel from eternal destruction. The vital truth is that the most obedient and faithful of all saints is as much in need of God's mercy and grace as is Hitler, Eichmann, or an infidel. Grace means that God accounts us as righteous when in reality we are not. We all *deserve* to go where we suppose Hitler and infidels have gone, for we are rebels against God. It is only through Christ, and not by any goodness on our part, that God is pleased to save us by grace through faith. None of us is more worthy of heaven than Hitler, and in view of Paul's language, we can all think of ourselves as "chief of sinners". If any of us is saved, it will be but by the grace of God. Thank God, I'm not just writing words. I really believe that!

But if you ask if baptism is essential in terms of responding to the gospel and becoming a Christian, the answer has to be *yes.* When the gospel was first proclaimed by Peter, which is the precious news that Christ is risen, that He is Lord and Christ, and that through Him we have victory over sin, there was a thunderous response, "What shall we do?" The apostle charged them to "Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Or as we have already quoted from the Christ: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16).

It is like my gift of books. It is necessary that I respond by writing the publisher and identifying myself. If nothing else, it demonstrates that I believe my friend when he promises the set of books. My responding makes it no less an act of his grace than if he walked in and dumped the books into my lap. The Bible is replete with instances of responding, obeying faith, all the way from the building of an ark to the offering of a son upon an altar. Baptism is in this category—*a cultivation of grace.* The question for us to ask ourselves is whether we have not left the impression in our teaching that immersion is something we do to achieve salvation. Whatever the reason, our people are known as "a works church", much the same way the Roman Catholic Church is, and we have failed to leave the impression that we *really* believe in salvation by grace.

In the light of the foregoing I am prepared to agree with Martin Luther when he concluded from his study of *Romans* that man is saved by faith—and by faith *only.* I am further persuaded that if the modern church does not recapture the sense of sin that Luther's reformation realized, and if it does not reaffirm its need of the grace of God, it will not have the vitality to be a resource of spiritual power to a lost world.

Those of us who long for the deeper resources of power must look to the grace of God. It was amidst harassment from Satan that Paul cried to God for deliverance, imploring that a

dreadful thorn in the flesh might be taken away. Again and again and again Paul prayed that God would relieve him of his misery. Finally the answer came, and had Paul not suffered we might not now have one of the most strengthening passages of all the Bible: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

If one will but grasp its significance and appropriate it to his own life, that inspiring statement uttered by our Lord to a suffering man can transform his life. As Phillips renders it: "My grace is enough for you: for where there is weakness, my power is shown the more completely." What a tremendous resource of power for those who will but believe it!

God does not always deliver us from our problems, and it may be our lot to experience much tragedy. But God's grace will sustain us. Life can be a weary and dreary ordeal, but God's grace will strengthen us. Some of us have to bear slander, misinterpretation, and cruel misjudgments, which may be the most painful burdens to bear, but the grace of God will make us sufficient even here. Indeed the apostle could declare, "By the grace of God I am what I am." If we are what we are by God's grace, we should not desire to be anything else.

It is the essence of tragedy for man to frustrate such great and wonderful grace. We see it sometimes in an ungrateful child who spurns all the sacrifices and plans that dedicated parents have made for him. Many a parental heart has been broken when a foolish child goes his own irresponsible way in spite of all the loving pleas that anguished minds can muster.

How much greater is the tragedy when man spurns the grace of God. This was what disturbed Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians: "We entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1). Notice that he is urging church members to rely on God's grace. He even says to those already baptized: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And many a church member there is in our day who needs to experience "the day of salvation" by making God's grace real in his life.

Paul goes on to implore them: "Widen your hearts." And he says further: "You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections." He is urging them to open their eyes to see what the power of God can do to their lives. They have cut off the resources of power by being concerned about many things that are far less important than the grace of God in their hearts.

Grace! 'tis a charming sound,
Harmonious to the ear;
Heav'n with the echo shall resound
And all the earth shall hear.
Grace first contriv'd the way
To save rebellious man;
And all the steps that grace display,
Which drew the wondrous plan.
Grace led our wand'ring feet
To tread the heav'nly road;
And now supplies each hour we meet,
While pressing on to God.
Grace all the work shall crown
Through everlasting days;
It lays in heav'n the topmost stone,
And well deserves our praise.

(Taken from *Christian Hymnbook,* originally published about 1835 by Alexander Campbell.)—*The Editor*

FOUR CONSEQUENCES OF LEGALISM

OBERT HENDERSON

The purpose of this article is to point out four consequences of legalism: human pride, anxiety, spiritual paralysis and disputes among Christians. These four consequences are clearly undesirable so far as one's spiritual welfare is concerned. However, from the standpoint of some who teach (we call it "preach") one of the consequences—human pride and the resulting party spirit—appears to be desirable, that is, this is a result they strive to achieve through their teaching.

Human Pride

If one holds to a legalistic view of justification and also considers himself righteous, pride and arrogance result. The reason is that legalism is a system in which one depends on himself for righteousness rather than upon God — righteousness achieved through law keeping is a righteousness of one's own self (Phil. 3:9). Thus the legalist who thinks himself to be righteous *must* consider this to be the result of his own merit. When one views the source of his righteousness as being in himself, the result can only be an arrogant spirit.

Growing out of this pride is legalism's manifestation of itself in a party sprit. One who thinks he is righteous by his own doings will believe that only those who are just like him are also righteous. Only those who think as he thinks, who do only what he does and who interpret just as he interprets can possibly be accepted by God. Legalism stresses that justification is achieved only through infallibly correct understanding and practice (since one mistake condemns). Therefore, it follows that if a legalist thinks himself saved, he *must* also view as saved only those who are just like him. This means, to him, that the party with which he is associated constitutes the "loyal church", and only those in that party are Christians.

This particular consequence of legalism, as mentioned above, seems to be desirable so far as many preachers are concerned. They want those whom they teach to believe the party they represent is the equivalent of the body of Christ. For instance, I heard a preacher complain recently that a certain percentage (I think he said 10 percent—and I wonder how he got his statistics) of the members of the Church of Christ actually thought that there were Christians outside their group. Though from men's standpoint a party spirit may be desirable, from God's standpoint it is far from it, since the party spirit is classed along with other "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Anxiety

Another undesirable consequence of legalism is that it may be the source of tremendous anxiety and fear among those who accept its dogmas. If one fully recognizes the implications of legalism, and yet accepts it, it is not difficult to see how the result can be anxiety, tension and insecurity.

Justification by law requires perfect law keeping, with no mistake at all being allowed. If Christianity is a system of legalism, this means the Christian who falls short is doomed. But we do fall short—"if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8). Now, if one accepts

legalism, and recognizes his own personal imperfections, the resulting conflict which he experiences may well lead to frustrating anxiety and shattering tension. This anxiety, fear, tension can be a cause of emotional disturbance. It has been pointed out by others that there is a high correlation between legalistic religion and mental illness. Robert Meyers has made brief reference to this ("The Rising Tide," *Mission Messenger,* May 1962). Norman Parks has also written about this problem ("The Attack on Mental Illness," *Gospel Guardian,* Sept. 6, 1962). Lest there be any misunderstanding, it should be emphasized that the *Guardian* did not editorially endorse Parks' article. Instead, Robert Welch wrote a strong denial of its implications ("The Mental Illness Attack Gains Momentum" in the same issue.)

The reason for the relationship between legalism and mental illness may well lie in the fact that the legalist may be characterized by strong guilt feelings. He knows he does not keep law perfectly, and so feels the guilt of sin. Legalism provides no consciousness of continual cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7), therefore provides no basis for a recognition of true forgiveness. As a result, the guilt one feels may become oppressive. The impossibility of reconciling the conflict between knowledge of his own imperfection, and the idea that he must earn salvation through perfect law keeping, may be more than the individual can handle.

One way in which some try to reconcile this conflict is to attempt to do enough good works to offset their shortcomings, so that on net balance, the scales tip in their favor. Their lives are a continual round of frenzied activities as they try to earn their salvation. In its extreme, this response goes to the point of one's manufacturing laws for himself (and perhaps trying to bind them on others too). One becomes an expert at weaving a fabrication of new laws from the sheerest of threads, even invisible ones. A case in point is the man I once heard of who slept with his head hanging off the bed since "the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." The "example" of Jesus became a law! Of course, we can smile indulgently at his hobby, but are some of our laws not woven of similar thread?

What is being said here does not mean that God does not want active service from Christians. He does. We are to "try our hardest" (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:5—NEB). And this involves, as Jesus said, self-denial, cross-bearing and even losing our lives (Matt. 16: 24-26). But, it must be emphasized that there is a great difference between one's frantic observance of outward forms and his "trying his hardest" which manifests itself in one's losing his life to the will of God!

A difficulty with the approach to Christianity that results in this frantic frenzy is that the motivation for such frenzy reflects an absence of assurance, peace of mind or hope. The concept which causes one to be worried that he hasn't quite done enough to tip the scales in his favor robs the word of God of the promises that assure the believer of salvation (John 1:16; 1:24). It overlooks the confidence that we can have in Jesus (1 John 1:7; Rom. 4:8; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). One characterized by this frenzy can never really feel free from fear, nor

can he say "It is well with my soul." In contrast, John writes, "So our love for him grows more and more, filling us with complete confidence for the day when he shall judge all men — for we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us. Love contains no fear—indeed fully developed love expels every particle of fear, for fear always contains some of the torture of feeling guilty. This means that the man who lives in fear has not yet had his love perfected" (1 John 4:17-18, Phillips).

Another quite different response to the tension that arises from legalism is for one to limit his application of "binding law" to a relatively few outward observances and forms. He reduces Christianity to a set of laws that *can* be kept. Then he keeps these, and so feels justified. For instance, he will say that the "laws" concerning baptism, the Lord's Supper, attendance at certain assemblies, dropping something in a collection plate each Sunday, and similar things are important. He makes salvation dependent on observing these. But, the "laws" concerning perfection, idle words, thoughts, love, patience, and similar things to these are held to be unrelated to salvation. The New Testament writings are thus divided into two sets of "laws", one set relating to outward observances deemed to be essential to salvation—in fact, a set by means of which one can earn salvation. The other set, relating to the spirit, the inner man and self-crucifixion, is considered to be unimportant. Since these things constitute a different "law", failure to keep them is regarded as insignificant and not detrimental to one's approval by God. By making this two-way split, it is possible for one to rationalize his shortcomings as being in an insignificant area, and point to his observance of the important "laws" as proof of his righteousness. He is thereby able to solve the conflict which legalism otherwise poses. By limiting the application of legalism to a few "laws" which can be easily kept, he can relieve the tension and frustration that others feel in the face of legalism. I suppose that so far as mental health is concerned, this has some value. So far as spiritual health is concerned, it is a highly questionable approach to Christianity, to say the least!

Spiritual Paralysis

A third undesirable consequence of legalism is what we may call "spiritual paralysis." By this is meant the condition in which the Christian becomes inactive with respect to God's service. In fact, we may say that he is psychologically unable to be active, he is paralyzed. This paralysis grows out of one's recognition of his utter incapability to merit salvation. Legalism says that a man must do this, by his own works and strength. What appears to happen is that some, accepting the dogma of legalism, simply give up trying. They know that the situation is hopeless, if legalism is true! The attitude is one of despair: "Why invest in a hopeless cause?"

I know a man whom I consider to be a fine Christian who has testified to his own experience in this regard. He had been taught that he must earn his salvation by his own merit. But, he came to realize he could not do it. Recognizing the hopelessness of the situation, he simply quit trying. As a result, he was for a time, "unfaith-

ful." It was not until he realized that we are saved by grace through faith, and not by law through merit, that he again became an active Christian. When he understood that he is saved by the merits of Jesus' blood, he had hope. And seeing the relationship of serving God to his salvation—that he serves because he belongs to God — he was motivated to activity and service.

We often hear references of one kind or another to the number of people who used to be Christians but who are no longer faithful. I wonder how many of these have become discouraged and have given up because they realized the utter hopelessness of the legalism which they were taught. How many have been spiritually paralyzed in this way? And how many of these might be restored to active service and commitment by an appeal based on God's grace and the merits of the blood of Jesus as the means for their salvation?

Conflict and Disputes

The last undesirable consequence of legalism which we consider here is that it often is a source of disputes and wrangling among brethren, as well as the occasion for hair-splitting. The question of attending assemblies can provide us with an illustration.

Based on a misconception of Hebrews 10:25, legalism makes attendance at assemblies a law, the keeping of which helps one earn his salvation. But, legalism inevitably faces a question arising out of this: "How many assemblies must one attend in order to fulfill the law. Must he attend all assemblies, or only the one of Sunday morning?"

I can recall past experiences when this question came up in Bible classes. Invariably, there was much hair-splitting as we tried to distinguish between assemblies—to differentiate the Sunday morning meeting from the one on Sunday evening, or from the midweek meeting. We were trying very seriously to arrive at an answer to "what does the law require?", being unaware that it wasn't a matter of law to begin with. I remember that I was always dissatisfied with the answers that were given, and it bothered me that I had no satisfactory way to deal with the questions. Now, recognizing it is not a matter of law, the questions pose no problem.

This same question of "how much attendance" is often the occasion for conflict and disputes among Christians. This conflict is often seen in preacher-member relationships. Legalism always sets a minimum somewhere, and says that when one has met that, he is then righteous. Disputes arise when one person tries to set the minimum for someone else. When a preacher attempts to set the minimum attendance for members of the congregation, he often runs into opposition and criticism from those who want to set it for themselves at another (lower) point. The preacher usually sets the minimum attendance essential for one to be saved at three meetings a week (unless there is an evangelistic meeting in progress). The reason for three is that the congregation usually holds meetings on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night.

It seems to me that much of this sort of dispute could be eliminated if we would talk about devotion to God, self-denial, seeking to build up our brother, and such things as these and less about "law".

Conculsion

So far as the cause of Jesus Christ and the spiritual welfare of Christians are concerned, all the consequences mentioned are undesirable. They are traceable, everyone of them, to legalistic teaching. This being true, then a long step toward healing these troubles and solving the problems would be taken if we would abandon a legalistic approach and instead, preach and teach God's grace, and man's response by faith, as the basis for our salvation (Eph. 2:8-10).

The one who fully recognizes that he is a sinner saved by grace, and who realizes the implications of this truth, will commit himself wholly to Jesus. His entire life will be devoted to the love for God which arises out of this recognition. "We love him because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

The answer to legalism is a recognition of grace. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). When one realizes that salvation is by grace through faith, and not by merit through law keeping, then he can have hope, peace, assurance and a motivation to full service arising out of love prompted by understanding something of God's love. And there can be freedom from the paralyzing and spiritually deadening results of legalism!

Fortunately, many who are exposed to legalism rise above it, and conduct themselves as those who realize they are sinners saved by grace. But, so long as legalism continues to bind others to fear, pride and factionalism there is a need for emphasis of the fact that "the Spirit (we) have received is not a spirit of salvery leading (us) back into a life of fear, but a Spirit that makes us sons . . . " (Rom. 8:15, NEB). And there is need for the clear proclamation of the truth that "Christ set us free, to be free men" (Gal. 5:1).—117 *Sheridan, Loveland, Colo.*

BOOK NOTES

Why Christians Crack Up is written by an M.D. and it deals with the causes of and remedies for nervous trouble in Christians. His chapter on how immaturity effects mental health is worth the $2.95 that the books cost.

The Practical Use of the Greek New Testament by Kenneth Wuest does not call for even a working knowledge of Greek. He opens up many facets of scripture that are missed if one never considers the Greek. $3.25.

We have a new supply of Cochran's *The Fool of God,* which is the story of Alexander Campbell, and a book that you should not miss. *Raccoon John Smith,* also by Cochran, may be even more important since it deals with a very important pioneer Disciple that we do not know as well as Campbell. They are both paperback and are only $1.95.

Voices of Concern: Critical Studies in Church of Christism is a book you are hearing about, and will continue